DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 040 098 SO 000 027

AUTHOR	Palmer, John
TITLE	Lessons of the 60's.
INSTITUTION	Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., Boulder, Colo.
PUB DATE	10 Jun 70
NOTE	7p.; Presented at Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., International Conference, June 12-13, 1970, Denver, Colorado
AVAILABLE FROM	Social Science Education Consortium, 970 Aurora, Boulder, Colo. 80302
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Curriculum Development, Curriculum Evaluation, Curriculum Planning, Educational Objectives, *Educational Trends, Inquiry Training, *Relevance (Education), *Social Studies, Student Alienation, *Student Needs

ABSTRACT

The 60's was not a period of innovation in social studies curriculum. The profession demonstrated little conviction as to the function and potential of social studies in general education; rather, it responded to "what others wanted done." The social studies were discipline oriented, dominated by the scientific method (inquiry and discovery) and the traditional historical orientations. Students would have preferred the function of social studies and the schools to be what was called for by prominent social studies specialists of the 30's: self-fulfillment, consideration of relevant social problems, the criticism of failures of the system, and the building of a new social order. The 70's may bring a marked shift of emphasis. (This paper will be published later by the Social Science Education Consortium). (DB)

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LESSONS OF THE 60'S

John Palmer
Professor of History and Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin

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JUN 2 1970

If the context within which I work day by day, is what it seems to be, it is almost impossible to believe that only ten years have passed since 1966. The launching of Sputnik, for example, could well have occurred in the Middle Ages in terms of its apparent impact on undergraduates preparing to be teachers in 1970. This may only mean that we have failed to develop a sense of history in our students, but certainly public education ten years ago was responding to Sputnik and other events of the period that now have been largely forgotten. The outcry for excellence and scholastic achievement which dominated the 60's combined very well with the popular writings of the educationist's hero of the period, Jerome Bruner. While the direction such stimulators provided was broad enough to permit a wide range of responses, an emphasis on the disciplines including the social or behavioral sciences as well as history, structure, inquiry, and learning in terms dictated by organized bodies of knowledge were most prominent.

It is interesting how totally obscured were the viewpoints and materials offered by Harold Rugg, Henry Harap, E. B. Wesley, Robert Lynd, or the Educational Policies Commission (to name only a few) during the 1930's. It was as if we had had a total loss of memory or the work of the 30's was so absurd that we had best forget. However, I urge you to listen to what students, including students preparing to teach, are now saying and compare it to what Rugg or Lynd (yes, even Wesley) said thirty or forty years ago about the function of social studies. Of course our students today believe no educator has previously advocated using the schools for self fulfillment, dealing directly with pressing social questions, pointing out the failures of the social, political, or economic status quo, or deliberately building a new social order. Many of the statements by prominent social studies specialists of the 1930's are more consistent with today's trends among students than what we did in the 1960's.

The point I want to make is that the major trend of the 60's in social studies now appears to have been a convenient response to forces that have already faded from memory or lost their potency. Other realities such as racial tension, poverty, alienation, conflicting values, etc., were there, of course, but we chose to keep them in the background. The curricula survive and still are called "new" but the original reasons for them have largely vanished. Of course we are adept at developing justifications for what we have but they become increasingly strained as events press in upon us. If we face such difficulties consider the plight of the elementary, secondary, or college student who is caught up in the anti-intellectualism, humanism, and extreme concern for the contemporary that is part of the youth culture. Is it too unfair to say that we responded to outside pressures, took USOE funds, did what someone else wanted done, and in other ways exemplified Riesman's other-directed man? This is obviously unfair to those who had always believed that the schools should do what it was popular to do during the 60's. As a profession, however, we were not clear in 1960 what we ought to do in the social studies and I see no evidence that we are now. There were many individual exceptions, of course, but even those individuals conflicted very profoundly among themselves as to the purpose of social studies. A survey of the national projects that developed during the 60's makes the point very well. I have to conclude that the same will be true of the 70's. We have demonstrated little sense of conviction as to the function of social studies in general education, and as a consequence we frequently make rapid shifts in purpose and program. Actual school programs are far more stable, of course.

Part of our problem may be that we aren't sure what we can accomplish even if we want to. We know that we can teach students to give correct responses to conventional test items with some regularity. Beyond that we proceed with great uncertainty. The 60's brought very little progress. Many obviously have faith in what they are doing but little evidence to support that faith. Behavioral or performance objectives are

absurd for the social studies at this point. Much of what we want to do we cannot measure, and many doubt if the measurable learning outcomes are worth striving for. This situation bothered us during the 60's and no doubt made lists of concepts and generalizations more attractive as basic content than they might otherwise have been.

While the social science or history scholar became much more active in the social studies during the 60's, students were seriously neglected. To be sure, materials were often field tested and revised, but this is very different than beginning to construct materials with the student as the primary consideration. It will be difficult to overlook the student in the 70's, not, it seems, because we have suddenly become "child centered" but because it is impossible to ignore student strikes and less overt forms of rejecting what is now going on in classrooms. Ronald Lippitt's article on the neglected learner in a recent SSEC Newsletter is a portent of what is coming.

The emphasis on the disciplines in the 60's and the desire to improve the intellectual rigor of the schools resulted in much attention to very systematic study, to learning research and thinking skills, and in general to a more intellectual social studies program. Elements of Dewey's complete act of thought, usually identified as inquiry or discovery learning, suddenly became in vogue despite the fact that Dewey was also the villain responsible for the deplorable state of the schools prior to 1960. A great deal of systematic, rigorous cognitive exercise was built into the new materials of the 60's. This is true for those projects in the main stream which emphasized the disciplines but also for the strategies and materials produced by the main counter-movement represented by Oliver and Shaver and Hunt and Metcalf. There is a tough-minded empiricism in both strands if one executes the classroom strategies faithfully. The scientific method is the heart of most such strategies.

All of this is consistent with the widely accepted conception of schooling or work of any kind as being worthwhile only if it is difficult and demanding. The 60's have closed with a broad challenge by the young to the values associated with technology, rationalism, and objectivity and to the scientific method as the best source of valid

knowledge. While many youngsters may have little understanding of this trend, they feel it and sense that it involves rejection of those inquiry models and research techniques that form the backbone of much that we have produced during the 60's. The gulf between the more sophisticated students and the materials we now have to give them is wide and deep. As I suggested earlier, some of the materials produced during the 30's would have much more appeal. If an age of science and technology has brought us to our present polluted, racist, poverty ridden, war ravaged state, these students contend, then surely other means of seeking truth must be found.

Because we were discipline rather than society or student centered during the 60's, we produced materials that emphasized the specialized inquiry procedures of research scholars in the social sciences. While we may claim such procedures can and should be transferred to assist in solving everyday personal and social problems, it is not always easy to convince others that the ways of scholarship and the ways of everyday life coincide. As a consequence, in much of our work in the 60's we may have continued to emphasize the gap between the lives of youngsters and their classroom activities. Few believe they will ever have need to conduct an opinion poll, analyze and assess the validity of historical documents, or develop and test an hypothesis relevant to a given universe of events. Even more serious, however, is their growing rejection of these modes of arriving at reliable knowledge in any context.

Perhaps we have not been totally unaware of the gap we have been creating. Concern for value education, while peripheral, has been growing. It is doubtful it is would have occurred had we not felt that the nature of the good, the true, and the beautiful were becoming increasingly obscure and debatable. But the affective areas of learning are troublesome to deal with. They can easily lead us into controversial discussions, they arouse emotion, they disturb parents, and they are very difficult to evaluate. But values are at the heart of individual and societal concerns. Because they seem to be quite personal, values, attitudes, and feelings are more crucial to

many youngsters than what we usually refer to as social science knowledge. While classes which deal with student attitudes and values frequently become "bull sessions", the inquiry processes used in such sessions may seem to be more realistic to students than the rigorous inquiry models presented in teaching guides.

I have spoken to this point as if the past decade were completely dominated by one trend. Time is limited so there is little opportunity for qualifiers, but let me quickly correct the picture of a unified movement throughout the 60's. I believe an examination of the Amherst Project, the Carnegie-Mellon Project, and the Minnesota Project, to name only three of the better known, shows that each retained much of the traditional historical orientation, although it was sometimes hidden behind a facade of social science inquiry.

If one defines social science in a manner that goes beyond merely the use of careful, systematic procedures (a definition that includes as scientific the way I brush my teeth or care for my roses) but emphasizes rather the development of testable and tested propositions and theories which account for the interrelationship of a complex of phenomena, then much of the curriculum work of the 60's that passes for social science has been improperly labeled. What we have instead is a body of descriptive material, frequently emphasizing descriptive concepts, that tells the student what is or was out there in society. This is closely akin to traditional history and political science, spiced by a liberal borrowing of concepts from the other social sciences. My point is not that this is bad and we should be ashamed of ourselves. I only want to indicate how I view what many have tried to claim was somehow new. It is quite possible that given the state of the social sciences and history, we really couldn't have done much else. Certainly an examination of current attempts at comparative studies and other efforts to develop explanatory theories in the social sciences are quite discouraging.

Whether social science was accepted wholeheartedly or not, defining structure

so as to include research procedures as well as verified knowledge claims coupled with the idea of engaging students in inquiry within a discipline made it almost mandatory that every new curriculum at least appear to be in step with social science. The fact that on occasion the substance was different than the appearance is significant for it emphasizes that many approaches to the social studies were still very much alive and only waiting for a more congenial atmosphere in which to reassert themselves.

History has no knowledge structure other than the narrative, but it had to be made to fit into a social science model if it was to be a part of the new curricula. The fact that historians themselves have been unwilling and/or unable to do this was ignored in the clamor to share in the popular trend of the day. In the 1930's economics was converted into the study of consumer buying in much the same fashion. In varying degrees each of the disciplines had to be remodeled to fit the prevailing perception of what a discipline should be. With the exception of economics, this caused serious difficulties. The social sciences simply have not as yet validated powerful, clearly defined sets of concepts, generalizations and theories that are acceptable to most scholars and thus can be presented to students. The fact that in some cases it took years of workshops and position papers by experts to finally come to a decision as to what really is the structure of a given field should have told us something. Many such painfully prepared statements are really quite useless either as authoritative statements as to the state of the field or as guides to curriculum building. I hope we have learned from this experience that it is essential that we endeavor to understand any field of scholarship as it is and in its own terms but that in our capacities as educators and curriculum developers we cannot alter the nature of a discipline. We can and should, of course, use what any field has to offer for our own purposes, and there have been many positive results from the effort that has been made to understand the nature of social science and historical knowledge and the cognitive processes associated with the various research procedures.

I have suggested that the time may be at hand for a marked shift of emphasis. Last fall in a large suburban high school in the Minneapolis area the students spent the first several weeks of a social studies course sitting on the floor constructing a rug in order to become more aware of each other and share in a common enterprise. Once the rug was completed they sat on it. It is difficult to imagine this being done in 1965. But if we do experience a change of direction, will it be on the basis of a considered analysis of the total situation or will it be because it is the path of least resistance? Looking back to 1960 and beyond, it appears that we scurry from program to program returning often to old ground but seeing it each time as new and necessary. I would think anyone over sixty who has experienced several such cycles would become concerned about the point of it all or at the very least be amused.